

Mt Carmel UMC

May 4, 2025

Native American Sunday

“Gone Fishin’” - John 21.1-19 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

This story may speak to those of us who ever want to quit and give up and just go back to doing whatever it was we used to do. It also speaks to us when we don't quite know what to do. I don't know, did you ever have one of those “I don't know” conversations? It usually starts with someone asking, “What do you want to do?” And the response comes back... “I don't know, what do you want to do!?” The disciples may not have been into strategic planning but instead were just looking for something to do, when inspiration hits Peter and he and some of the other disciples decide to go back to doing what they knew how to do, they went fishing. And this decision allows this gospel story to end where it all began with Jesus talking with Peter and inviting him to follow and to learn how to fish for disciples. Here in the end, I believe that Peter finally learns what that means. It is my hope that we will learn it too!

Let's begin our message with Peter out on his boat fishing alongside the other disciples. He is brooding, thinking deep thoughts not quite sure what to make of all that had happened. Then there is a flashback. He recalls how three years earlier he left his fishing nets at the seashore to become a follower of Jesus and how Jesus liked him and included him and changed his name from Simon to Peter (Petros, the Rock) because Jesus felt that he was strong, stable, and solid like a rock. But then all of a sudden, things turned sour. Jesus was arrested and Peter the Rock got scared and on that fateful night, he denied his Lord three times. The next day Jesus was nailed to a cross and Simon Peter was devastated, shattered, defeated, and broken-hearted. But then came Easter and Simon Peter was at one and the same time thrilled beyond belief, excited, and gratified over Christ's resurrection and yet confused and perplexed about his own future.

So, several days seem to pass and nothing has happened. Here is where our scripture today picks up. Simon Peter and his friends have been waiting there in Galilee for some time just waiting, waiting for some direction from God, but nothing has happened. Finally, in typical fashion, Simon Peter gets impatient. He can't take it anymore, and he says, “I'm going fishing!” Now it's as if Simon is saying, “I can't handle this any longer. This waiting is driving me up the wall. I'm worn out with the indecision, the waiting, the risk involved; and I'm going back to the old secure life, the old life of being a fisherman.” The others go along with him.

They fish all night, but no luck. But then as dawn breaks, they see someone standing on shore. It's the Risen Lord, but they don't recognize him at this point. He tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. They do, and they bring in a huge catch of fish: 153 large fish. (Scholars don't know why this number is included – I postulate it may represent the number of disciples/fish Peter caught in his ministry.)

John turns and says to Peter, “It is the Lord.” Simon Peter excitable and impulsive dives in and swims to shore urgently. The others come in on the boat. As they come ashore they see the Risen Christ cooking breakfast for them over a charcoal fire. After he serves them “the Last Breakfast”, it's not as well known as the Last Supper! Jesus then takes Peter off to the side and three times he asks him the same question: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” I find it interesting he reverts to calling him Simon rather than Peter! Perhaps it is because he has been

acting more Simony lately rather than Petery/Rocky! “Oh yes, Lord,” Simon answers. “You know that I love you.” “Then, feed my sheep,” the Risen Lord says to him. “Feed my sheep.”

If we love Jesus, we are to show that love by loving the people Jesus loves and caring for the people Jesus cares about! We are to feed them, not so much with edible food like the fish breakfast they just enjoyed, though we do like to feed people with church dinners and donations of boxes and cans of food for the food bank. But we are also to feed people the Good News of the love of Christ. In a world filled with hate, fear, and indifference; we are called to make a positive difference. We are called by our Lord to love, to care, and to feed.

The story ends exactly the way it started three years before with Christ saying to Simon at the seashore these words, “Follow me!” These words are spoken for us and to us. “What do you want to do? I don’t know, what do you want to do?” Some of you know that I have a “To Do List” in my pocket. It is a weekly list and there are things for me to do like laundry, mow the lawn, write a sermon, email the congregations, etc. but at the top of the list, that I look at each day it says, “Follow Jesus!” If you have a to do list add it to the top of the list and strive to do it every day. Follow Jesus. Feed his sheep. Share his Good News. Let’s Go Fishin’ Alleluia and Amen.

When Peter Saw Christ on the Shore

Jeffrey B. Childs 4/29/2025

(Tune: Old 100th UMH 621)

When Peter saw Christ on the shore,
It changed his life forevermore.
Jesus simply said, “Follow me.”
Peter became who he would be.

A disciple who walked the walk,
Learned from Jesus in every talk.
But when the Lord was crucified,
Three times Peter his Lord denied.

But this time there upon the shore,
Jesus appeared to him once more.
And when Peter his love professed,
By Christ’s mercy Peter was blessed.

The Lord told him to “Feed my sheep.”
A commandment for all to keep.
So, what’s Jesus saying to us,
About how we might love Jesus?